

VIDEO SYNOPSIS: Margaret Stratton

Introduction by Lauri Freking

:00 “What is art?”

How does art reach us, and when it does, what does it say? Art has the power to reveal truths and transform the way we think. It can make us see ourselves more clearly and it can pull us deeper into the rich diversity of life. Art can heal individuals and communities. But it's not just the masterpieces housed in places like the Des Moines Art Center that have this power. In this program, we'll introduce you to four Iowa artists.

Will their work have the power to move you?”

Margaret Stratton

Note: Parts of this video may not be appropriate for young learners. Photographs of human skulls appear in several photographs starting at counter 1:53.

Visual of the artist as she speaks, adjusting a camera. One of the characteristics of a good photograph is that it makes you see the subject in a way you've never seen it before. You have brought an interpretation of it to your audience. She speaks of the importance of composition, and how it can make a photograph more powerful.

Visual pans up on a photograph of an old, damaged religious statue.

1:53 The video shows photographs of human skulls. “I've always been really interested in what you would call terrible beauty, which is the beauty of the sublime.” She describes it as hard to find, to categorize, and maybe even to live with.

An image of many more skulls in an arrangement is shown. “It's what I'm interested in.”

2:16 There is a visual of an empty dormitory ward, decrepit, with worn mattress in the foreground. The artist describes making a series of photographs of American prisons that were abandoned.

She describes thinking about how human beings occupy architecture once they have left it. Once it's become ruined, it still bears the vestiges of those who occupied it and it still reverberates with the experiences of those who lived within its walls.

She wants to continue her work with places that have “this feeling of the soul, still present...hovering in the air.”

2:58 Ms. Stratton describes taking photographs of family possessions, and the gallery show called “Inventory of My Mother's House,” made up of 115 photographs. Many of these photographs are shown one by one and include household objects, sentimental objects. Then the gallery hallway is shown with all the photographs framed on a wall.

3:53 Next is a visual in a homey setting and Ms. Stratton shows the first camera she ever had, it's called the brick. It takes 35mm film, which she does not use, because the quality is not sufficient to make large prints. She opens the back of the camera.

Ms. Stratton describes her method of shooting 4 x 5 inch or 2 1/4 inch film and scanning it and printing it digitally.

more >

- 4:23 The artist is shown taking a large photograph out of a digital printer. She had planned to take a photograph at the Duwamish River, a toxic Superfund site in Seattle. Serendipitously, a man came along and ate his lunch at the water's edge. The photograph is shown as she speaks.
- 6:02 She shot black and white for more than 20 years. Now she wants to make color photographs, and she notes that you can send them out to be developed.
- 6:30 Ms. Stratton discusses having a strong sense of place. She is shown outside taking photographs. The "edges of places" are clear, she says. She is from the west coast, but has been in Iowa for 21 years. As she drove back and forth from Seattle to Iowa, she began to take photographs of the landscape instead of interiors.
- 6:41 Three photographs are shown: A port where shipping containers are stacked, a logging scene, and another port scene.
- 6:58 She describes putting things together, taking pictures of things that are important to her politically, making interesting photographs, and being able to be in the West, because she misses it. An image of a very large stand of haystacks is shown.
- 7:12 Ms. Stratton describes the tool of the panoramic camera, and having fun with it. She explores themes of man vs. nature, the impact of man on the land, wilderness, recreation, and cities. She feels that these issues are coming to a head because of global warming.
- 7:45 Ms. Stratton is shown in a teaching environment with a student. She remembers struggling as a student, and she feels that teaching keeps her young. She feels it is exciting to be with young people who experience making their ideas concrete.
- She is shown working with students at computer monitors and scanners.
- 8:32 She feels that the hands-on quality of photography makes it democratic; anyone can pick up a disposable camera and have the pictures developed. She sees this as powerful.
- Several images are shown: the man at the Duwamish River, a photograph of two mop heads, a photo of prison bars, and a chair in front of a window in an abandoned room.
- 9:43 End of Margaret Stratton section